

Under construction:

thoughts,

questions, DEMANDS, ~~internal~~⁺ conflicts

wounds, contradictions

frustrations,

worries, concerns and ~~broken~~, ~~breaking~~ dreams

**On the necessity for cultural transformation (in
the belly of the beast aka the fortress of Europe)**

Within the EU-funded Cultural Transformation Movement Project,² We artists/agents of change in Austria, Belgium, Italy and scattered across Europe (as a consequence of the ~~war~~ invasion of Ukraine) were given the task to collectively create an artistic statement. What we share here is an unfinished, deliberately unpolished, growing work in progress that connects to the ancient futures of the struggles and visions of so-called 'underrepresented communities.' In that wider sense the work continues until transformation in the cultural field and with it and beyond the eco-social world as a whole is achieved.

We chose to create an artistic statement centered on questions. We chose questions because we were not asked to ask them.

We ask questions because we are tired of simply giving answers.

¹ Throughout the document we are following the practice by fellow artist of change Dounia Mahammed of using crossing out as a conceptual choice.

² in Brunnenpassage: Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur
in VIERNULVIER: Dounia Mahammed and Mira Bryssinck
in ZO: Elie Laucher and Emanuele Arturo Miceli
in IZOLYATSIA: Ksenia Ulianova
Facilitated by Laura Camacho Salgado

We ask questions because we don't like the answers we have been given.
We ask questions because the conflicts and crises we are experiencing force us to rethink our approach. We ask questions because the conflicts and crises we are experiencing force us to question our assumptions, and to adapt in ways we never thought possible or necessary.

We ask questions because each individual experience, with its unique challenges and lessons, contributes to the fabric of our shared humanity.

We ask questions because through this process of ~~“integration”~~ and dialogue, we imagine a future that embraces diversity, celebrates differences and finds strength in our collective humanity.

We ask questions, because we believe that critical questions and questionings are harder to be turned into a token diversity show.

We ask questions as a way to give importance and to voice what usually remains unspeakable and voiceless in statements like these. We ask questions as a way to break and question the conventional forms of statements like these.

We ask questions to open up the space even to things we are not sure of.

We ask questions to dare to go deeper than a polished surface.

We dare to ask questions as a transformative practice to question how and what we learn about ourselves, others and the world we live in.

We ask questions to expand our audacity in imagining a different world from within the belly of the beast, from within the fortress of Europe.

We ask questions to create space for vulnerabilities, insecurities, doubts, conflicts, criticisms, dreams, wounds,

We ask questions because we insist

that vulnerabilities, insecurities, doubts, conflicts, criticisms, dreams,
wounds,

are not to be erased.

A Polyphonic, Part One: Choruses Behind Our Text

How can I _____ ? Uniting questions

How can I write an artistic statement as an undercover neurodiverse Black artist of change from within the belly of the beast aka the fortress of Europe when to use the title of Olumide Popoola's poem "*you can't breathe water*"³?

How can I write an artistic statement as a Sicilian boy, from an ancient, traditional Sicily, underdeveloped, too intransigent to realize that it is such, make myself the spokesman of a generation of outcasts ?

How can I write an artistic statement as a female cultural practitioner navigating between different languages that has created her home in the limits of the fortress of Europe, as a cultural worker that tries to take place to amplify the voices that have been silenced by a patriarchal and colonial system that my ancestors have reinforced?

How can I write an artistic statement as a queer feminist mixed race artist carrying intergenerational colonial trauma, from within the belly of the beast? ~~How to not be exhausted, working in racist, sexist, classist, ableist structures, facing systems of oppression day by day, being tokenised, silenced? How not use every spare minute to engage as an activist when a genocide is happening in Palestine?~~

How can I write an artistic statement as a female artist with a disability when the artistic environment is not yet aware of ableism in society and in the art field and is still looking from an internalized capitalist gaze? How can one not be indignant by the many stories of colleagues who work in precarious situations as artists from underrepresented communities? How to find and co-create the right environments for artists whose careers are determined by similar issues?

How do we matter what it means to write an artistic statement as an Ukrainian artist in an EU project for cultural transformation while being on an army mission?

How to be in this world, when you are being an Ukrainian artist in military service having an ~~internal~~ conflict that questions the appropriateness of everything you have done before ?

³ <https://writersmosaic.org.uk/content/you-cant-breathe-water-olumide-popoola/>

A Polyphonic, Part Two: Choruses Behind Our Text

How can we_____ ? Voicing a growing we

How to

*create, contribute, find language, unsilence,
unlearn, transform*

*dismantle, expose, disrupt, show intertwining, liberate,
care, encourage, dream, hope, heal, imagine, take time,
embrace complexity, become allies &
move together?*

How to collectively create an artistic statement from within the fortress of Europe aka the belly of the beast that inspires “to dare to invent the future.”⁴?

How can we create an artistic statement in a language that will always exclude some?

How to take time? How to take time in a system ruled by production logic? How to take time to create art, to create artistic statements? How to take time to hear and to listen to unheard voices?

How can we contribute to transforming the violent, glorified neocolonial structures of the fortress of Europe (including ‘green colonialism’⁵) from within the belly of the beast?

⁴ Thomas Sankara

⁵ As Gunn-Britt Retter Head of Arctic and Environmental Unit, Saami Council states: “The green shift is nothing more than a continued extraction of resources in Sámi areas, as has been the tradition since the earliest encounters between cultures. The difference is that resource utilization has been given a nice color, green; we call it ‘green colonization.’ We were first colonized by people from outside our lands, then colonized by climate change itself, driven by people from outside our lands, and are now being colonized a third time by responses to climate change.

See: <https://www.arctictoday.com/indigenous-cultures-must-not-be-forced-to-bear-the-brunt-of-global-climate-adaptation/>

How can we create art that dares to transform the current times of war, crises, oppressive eco-social circumstances, status quo and structures within the belly of the beast?

How do we avoid romanticizing war and acknowledge it as a harsh reality?

What does holding a collective responsibility in the face of aggression mean to us as artists?

How can we build bridges while an enigmatic world of evil is redrawing the new borders of Europe with bombs?

How can we disrupt Europe's "racism amnesia"⁶ and contribute to decolonial architectures of remembrance that matter the rich histories of multifaceted resistances?

How can we find languages that healingly matter and address intergenerational trauma?

How can we align ourselves with the forces of peace, understanding, and compassion?

How can we center the struggle of the "Invisibles" the undocumented agricultural workers within the EU, "the wretched of the earth, left (...) in miserable work and living conditions"⁷ for the right to even have rights?

How can we expose the systematic hypocrisy of the fortress of Europe that builds on the exploitation of the "Invisible field workers" to bring fruits and vegetables (sometimes organic) into supermarkets in the EU?

How can we show the intertwining of these struggles?

How can we be(come) allies ? What do we need to consistently unlearn to build sustainable allyships dedicated to the struggle for global liberation?

⁶ Fatima El-Tayeb.

⁷ Aboubakar Soumahoro

How can we stay aware and self critical? How can we point out to people that are systematically absent?

How can we transform our collective understanding through adaptability and resilience?

How can we create a liberating SPACE for people to meet, think and unite? And what kind of space would it need to be?

How can we foster a community of tolerance and mutual respect?

How do we contribute to the unsilencing of silenced stories that yearn and struggle to be (re)membered and set free urgently?

How can we support and connect to each other's struggles?

How can we envision a future that embraces diversity, celebrates differences, and finds strength in our collective humanity?

How can we unlearn to leave no one unheard/ unseen?

How can we commit to ~~integrate~~ communities through dialogue about both present challenges and future aspirations?

How can we leave the door open? Some perspectives are not addressed when not everyone is in.

How can we encourage sustainable practices of caring ?

How can our efforts become an investment in the future, advocating for a world where understanding and love triumph over division and hatred?

How can we embrace opposing needs?

How can cultural exchange play a role in opening conversations and bridging divides?

How can we not get used to the idea of the existence of war and become a fortress of peace?

How can we embrace complexities and contradictions?

How do we consistently unlearn what refrains us from practicing deep listening?

How can we un/learn to see and take care of each other's wounds?

How can we “help” governments and stakeholders to see the importance of cultural transformation?

How to make the art scene and all of its ~~buildings~~ spaces and programming more accessible?

How to make art schools and all of their buildings and programs more accessible?

How to dismantle, address and resist tokenism?

How can we free ourselves from the logic of victims olympics to decolonize solidarity?

How to keep breathing?

How can we make the art field see that it is important to have diverse voices in places where decisions are made?

How to free our bodies, our minds, our feelings?

How to keep dreaming, hoping, imagining, creating?

How to survive, stay alive, unharmed, unattacked and safe?

A polyphonic, part three: Choruses behind our text

A never ending demanding end

Call to question. Call to action for structural transformations

Call to inaction “Rest is Resistance”⁸

1. We question the still normalized colonial capitalist gaze and exploitive modes of production in intersectional ways.
2. We resist being tokenized as neo-liberal diversity decor or alibi. To speak with Audre Lorde’s words: “ We are not a figment of your imagination or an exotic answer to your desires. We are not some button on the pocket of your longings.”⁹
3. We demand structural change and transformation
4. Art that “transformingly” matters and centers unheard voices.
5. Matter the voices of the 22.822 migrants (at least)¹⁰ that have found their unmattered death since 2014 and call out the underlying violent structures of the fortress of Europe
6. Art that is consistently “awaring” itself of the bodies : our bodies and their interconnectedness as artists, as people and beyond. Therefore accessibility and intersectionality are a necessity.
7. Art that does not get tired to strive to be, become and grow awareness of the multifaceted contexts, environments that we live and do not live in and beyond
8. We call for the necessity of a cultural transformation. To use the words of E. Jane: “*We are beyond asking should we be in the room. We are in the room, We are also dying at a rapid pace and need a sustainable future. We need more people, we need better environments, we need places to hide, we need Utopian demands, we need culture that loves us.*”¹¹
9. Art that transformingly questions and is open for generative questionings

⁸ See: Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto by Tricia Hersey. Rest Life <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nENorl4rWeU>

⁹ Audre Lorde in: May Ayim /Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye & Dagmar Schulz (ed), *Showing Our Colors. Afro German Women Speak Out* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), viii.

¹⁰ See: <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>

¹¹ E. Jane in NOPE (a manifesto) <https://e-jane.info/Text>

**The Art of asking questions.
A call of questioning. An open invitation.**

We ask questions, because we ask ourselves, alone and collectively, and you reading these words, which questions need to be asked to invite cultural transformation within the fortress of Europe?

Which questions do you yearn to be asked?

(Which questions are you tired of being asked?)

Which questions remained painfully unasked in the questions you read here?

We ask questions as a way to invite you to this collective construction side

by asking:

What are you forgetting and still yearning to be remembered?

What questions that you read here resonate with you and how?

What questions that you read here need to be questioned and how?

What questions do you feel are still in urgent need to be asked?

What are your questions?

What are you questioning?